

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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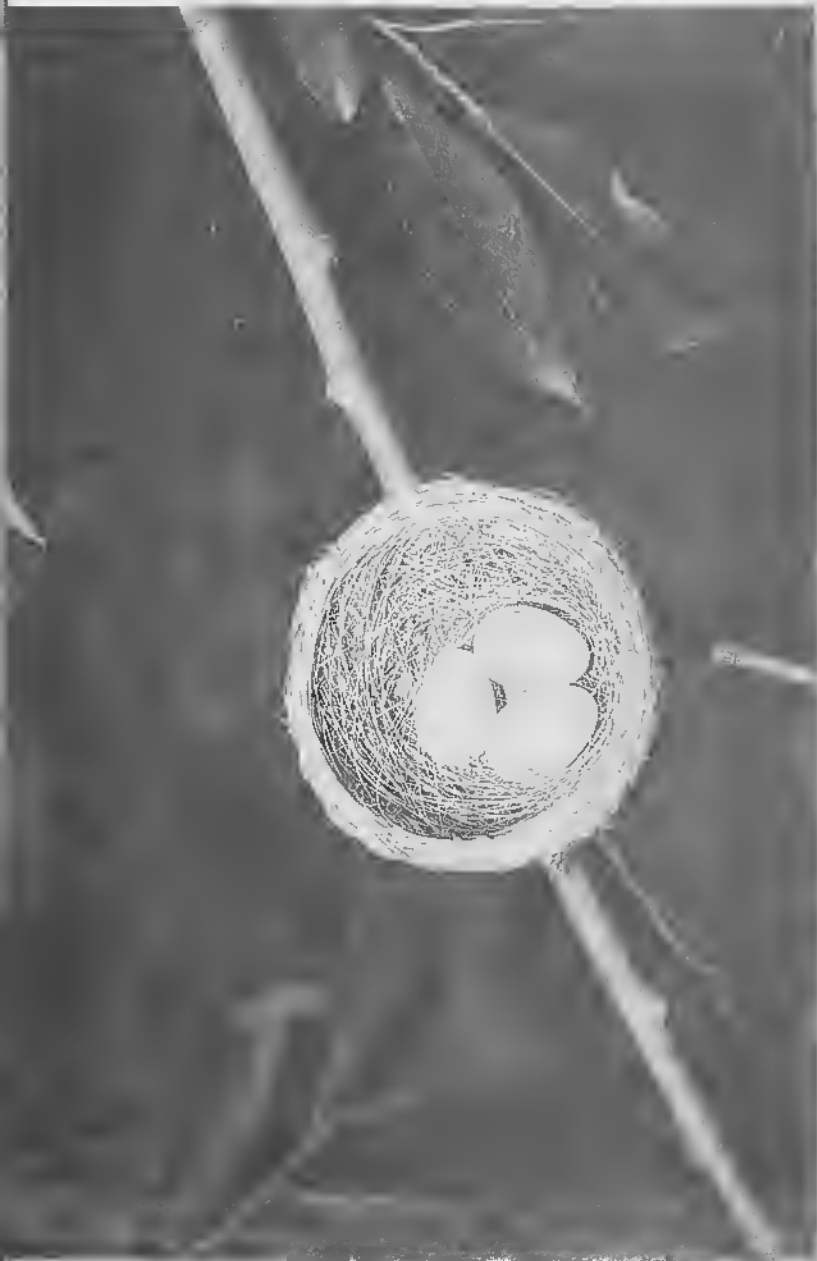


Breeding behaviour of the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher.

(article on page 3)

Photographs by S. Sridhar

- (1) *The cobweb is rolled up like a ball in the beak and brought to the nest under construction.*
- (2) *The eggs are laid early in the morning. One of the main threats to the nests were a pair of Tree Pies, Coucals and Jungle Crows.*
- (3) *When the young are hatched they are blind and naked. The chicks that hatched to coincide with the onset of pre-monsoon showers stood a better chance of survival.*



Shivraj Kumar Khacher

A few days after coming to Kodaikanal (13.3.89), I was looking over my bird photographs. Some were of Shivraj Kumar taken in Hingolghadh, Gujarat, and one showed him ringing an Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*). This must have been in the early 60's when Salim Ali and R. Schifferli of the Sempach Station in Switzerland, initiated bird ringing in India in a big way. I sent the photo to Shivraj Kumar and soon after I received a letter from him which I quote :

"I was delighted to get your letter and the old photographs taken during the bird ringing camp at Hingolghadh. It is such a long time since you came there ... We have managed to make the surrounding forest a Sanctuary and so it is getting some protection as the whole forest was taken away from us in 1973 under the Private Forests Protection Act. There was only one other such "forest" in Wankaner which was equally well protected by the owner (we did not ever cut a single tree to sell, all the years the forest was our private property, and ironically the land would have been with me till today if we had cut the trees and kept it as a more open grassland!), and so the Govt. took both these under the Act and had the satisfaction of having implemented a radical "socialistic" change !!! The Castle and some surrounding land is still with us, but alas the Stud Farm is only a memory. Times change and we went through some difficult periods, but now the tide is again flowing very slowly in our favour, and I am managing to look after the place well again. You will love to stay there again. I am also trying to develop it for special tourism; birds and country life; and am getting a couple of groups of tourists every year and hope to get more from next year. This helps in keeping the place looked after. But enough of "domestic" matters, and let's start on the birds. This year the Cranes came in good numbers and some are still here though they will be gone soon. Exciting sightings were 28 Black Storks and a Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*), a first record for the Indian sub-continent. This year with a good monsoon there are numbers of Bluethroats, large numbers of Black-headed Yellow Buntings, Tree Pipits and Grey-necked Buntings. Strangely, there are not any larger number of Wagtails! Went for an evening walk in the Hingolghadh Forest and saw large numbers of Grey-necked Buntings, a group of 5 Small Minivets, (the White-bellied Minivet which was found there has not been seen since several years, and I fear is lost to this forest), some Jungle Babblers. These birds I had released in 1950 after catching them at Wankaner where there is an isolated population, and they have bred and survived at Hingolghadh and



Pied Crested Cuckoo

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increased a little. A Little Green Heron at a pond near Jasdan fishes by diving into the water from its perch on a thin twig in the bushes overhanging the water. Very interesting to watch. Another Little Green Heron fishes like any other heron by crouching and stabbing for fish from the rocks on the lake shore."

And now Shivraj Kumar too has gone. He died in a Bombay hospital in May. The work he did for nature conservation, particularly in Gujarat will be a lasting memorial for him.

Research on Bayas

An indefatigable laboratory researcher is Dr. Mrs. Asha Chandola-Saklani, now with the Department of Zoology, Srinagar, Garhwal, U.P., 246174. Though her handwriting can be interpreted in many ways, I think her last letter goes something like this; "Can you do me a favour? As you know of my interest in the seasonal phenomena, reproducing, migration, moult, hibernation, (environmental and hormonal control) specially of Baya weavers, could you please keep some Baya (*Ploceus philippinus*) say males, and ask someone to make weekly notes on each animal on appearance of yellow plumage, song delivery and black beak pigment. To see the gonads we simply anaesthetise the bird and laparotomise and measure the gonads and stitch it up. Recovers within 15 minutes. Can you suggest someone in the South who could do some experiments in collaboration with me? We have data from field observers and captivity studies at 25°N, 30°N and now 22°N. But I want to know something about Baya below that, say at 18°, or 16°, or 10°N ... Our data shows birds enter breeding almost at same time, but duration and termination of breeding vary. While increasing day length triggers physiological preparation (stimulation of brain and reproductive hormones resulting in gonadal growth), rainfall and other factors are responsible for culmination of breeding activities."

Well, I hope there is someone in South India who can respond to Asha Saklani's request. One question : Does research of this kind help the Bayas or only bird watchers? I suppose one can never tell until one waits long enough. In the Jan-Feb issue of Birdwatchers Digest, there is a note about a study indicating that Barn Swallows prefer longer-tailed males over shorter-tailed males. "It took on the average, shorter-tailed males about four times longer to acquire a mate than males with longer tails." One can only admire the research involved. Ultimately one has to concede that knowledge is its own reward.

Arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo

Though my hearing/identification capacities are deteriorating too rapidly with age, I think I heard two Pied Crested Cuckoos on 25th May in Kodaikanal. Could this be motivated thinking since the birds are supposed to be heralds of the South West Monsoon, and since the papers today say that the monsoon is advancing. The Handbook, Vol.III, page 195, says : "In many areas arrive overnight with almost clockwork regularity heralding the monsoon in the last week of May or early June, proclaiming its advent unmistakably by loud metallic calls." It is strange that in spite of extensive ringing of birds done in India in the last twenty years, there is only "circumstantial" and "conjectural" evidence about their migration to and from Africa.

The Material Advantages of a Bird Sanctuary

Birdwatchers are aware that by saving a wetland, the advantage is not limited to saving avians, but it has far reaching ecological and economic advantages around the water body. This has been well explained in the December 1988 Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. In the article on the Birds of Haigam Rakh, Kashmir, the authors P.R. Holmes and A.J. Parr write : "If Haigam Rakh was not a reserve it would quickly be drained for paddy and some encroachment has already taken place. At present the Rakh has many uses.... Local people harvest the reeds for thatching and mat-making. The vegetation is used as cattle feed. Villagers catch fish in the open water areas. The willows planted along the edge, as well as acting as a silt trap, will in due course be a source of firewood for the local people."

The authors rightly say that what is essential in such areas is strict management (and) "there is no reason why there should be a conflict between these functions."

Blacknecked Cranes in Bhutan

Mrs. Jasji Man Singh, L24 Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi-110016, writes to say that she saw ninety Blacknecked Cranes (*Grus nigricollis*). These birds have become endangered because of the destruction of their favoured habitat in Ladakh and elsewhere. The Crane Congress (See announcement in this Newsletter), is bound to discuss their future. Mrs. Singh also saw the Rufousnecked Hornbill (*Aceros nipalensis*), and Kessler's Thrush (*Turdus kessleri*). The last is a rare visitor to the Eastern Himalayas according to the Handbook, and I hope Mrs. Singh is not mistaken, as her notes suggest that it was common.

BREEDING BEHAVIOUR OF THE WHITE SPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER - A Few Insights

S. Sridhar*, V. Govindarajan and H.B. Papanna

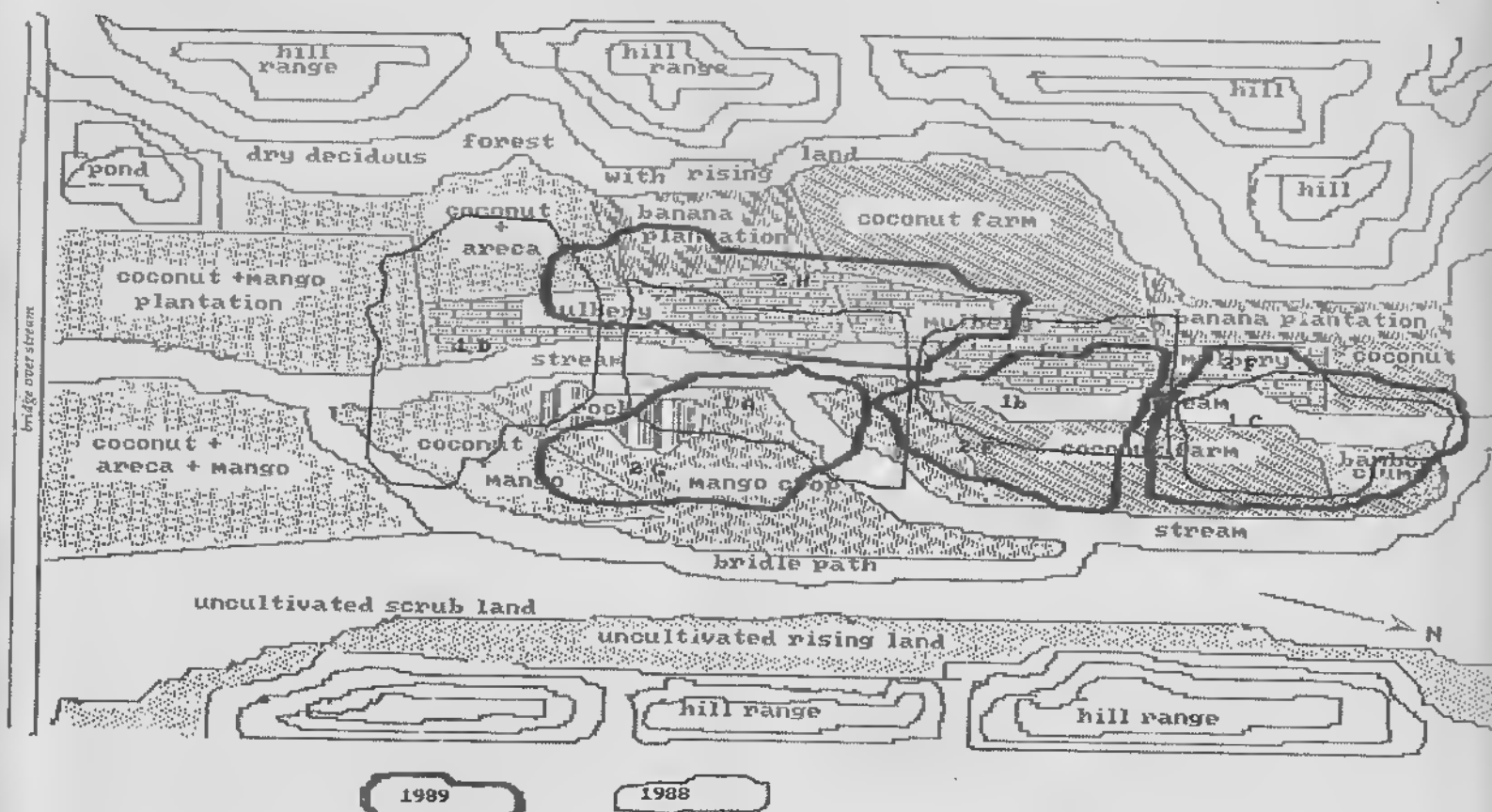
*No.51, 5th Temple Street, 15th Cross, Malleswaram, Bangalore 560 003

A lively flycatcher that is completely fearless is the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher (*Rhipidura albogularis*). For nearly two years now, we are observing these beautiful Flycatchers living in a valley covered with dry deciduous wood land, surrounding a stream, 50kms south west of Bangalore. We began our observation of the Flycatchers early in 1988. The birds were well suited for our study, because these birds in the area were highly territorial, as also their general calm disregard for humans made our task fairly easy. Each territory was vigorously defended against intrusion by other flycatchers that occasionally strayed into the area. (Fig.1)

Our observations during the breeding season of 1988 and 1989 gave us many insights into the breeding behaviour of these birds; especially their success, nest site

selection, predation, etc. To begin with we determined the territory of each breeding pair by observing the farthest point the birds visited from their respective nesting sites. The Flycatchers started their breeding activities by early March and continued up to middle of June.

Two environmental factors seemed to have great influence on the Flycatcher's successful breeding; predation and pre-monsoon showers. We suspect one of the main threats to their nesting attempts in the study area was a breeding pair of Tree Pies, and the likelihood of predation by Coucals and Jungle Crows. Another threat was the presence of red ants that were constantly moving in long lines along the many branches of the trees and shrubs in which the Flycatchers nested.



Note: territories of pairs 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D were observed in 1988 and 2E, 2F, 2G, 2H were observed in 1989

Fig.1. A view of the study area showing the territory of the Flycatchers for the year 1988 and 1989.

If one asks whether humans are responsible for any nesting failures the answer is yes. In two instances in 1989 fuel wood collection put an abrupt end to the nesting activity of the Flycatchers. Since any individual pair's nesting outcome is uncertain, all the breeding pairs seemed to be under stress. The reproductive success was quite low. In 1988, four breeding pairs built a total of 9 nests. Out of them only 2 pairs succeeded in raising a total of 6 chicks in their second attempt, showing a success rate of 27.3 percent for the season. In 1989 only one of the four pairs raised 3 chicks, a success rate of 21.4 percent. For example in 1988, one pair had to build 3 nests and even in its 3rd attempt could not successfully raise a family. Another pair built their nest twice and both the nests were robbed of their eggs and nestlings, thus putting an end to their costly investment in time and energy. (Fig.2)

The second crucial environmental aspect is the timing and amount of rain fall. The rains in this region are highly variable. After a dry spell of several months, pre-monsoon showers are normally expected around April end. In this connection we observed that the chicks that hatched to coincide with the onset of pre-monsoon showers (during later part of April or early May) stood a better chance of survival. Typically this happened in both the successful instances in 1988 when pre-monsoon showers lashed the study area on 30th April 1988, and also in the sole successful instance observed in 1989 when the area recorded

moderate rains during 1st and 2nd week of May.

The Flycatchers showed a marked preference for locating their nesting sites on trees and shrubs (between 3 and 10 feet from ground), present on either side of the stream abutting the farmland. Though the stream remains dry for most part of the year, water starts flowing along the stream during first week of May, when pre-monsoon showers are normally expected. All the nine nests of 1988 and five nests studied in 1989 were uniform in size and shape: a classic wine glass shaped structure built in the fork of a green or dry twig. The nest is made of fibres and thin bark wafers, collected individually by the birds, and the outside is plastered with cobweb.

The cobweb is rolled up like a ball in the beak and brought to the nest under construction. The bird then rubs the cobweb ball against the external wall of the nest with one deft semicircular movement to the left and another to the right. The cobwebs not only give a smooth finish but also help in insulating the nest. The birds sit in the nest when the nest is half completed and make clock-wise and anti-clockwise movements to give a circular shape to the nest. They also use their feet effectively to achieve this. The entire nest building activity takes 6 to 8 days to complete.

Even in the nest the bird is restless, often turning about, spreading its tail or flying for a short distance and returning. Both parents share the responsibility of nest

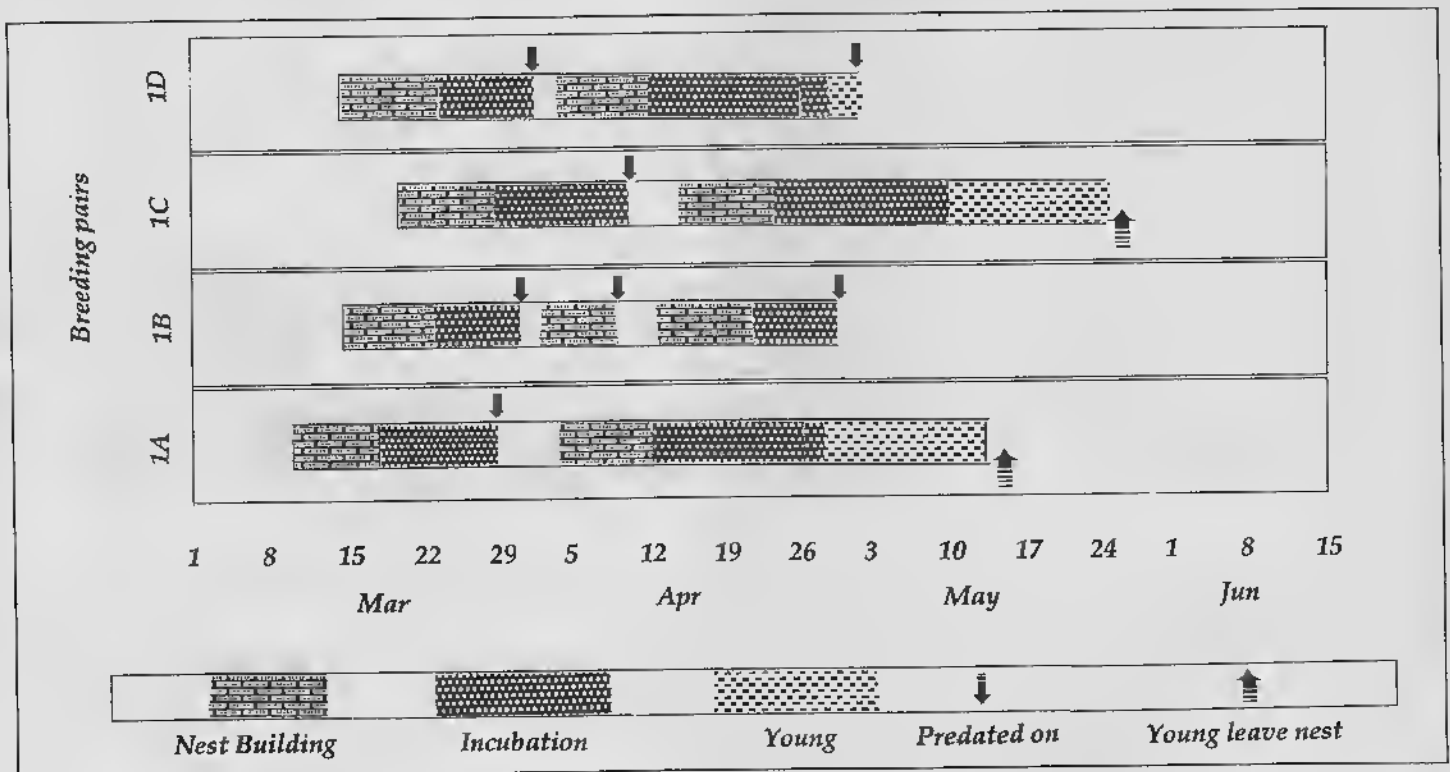


Fig.2. Breeding activities observed in the four pairs of Flycatchers in 1988.

building, incubation and care of young. One parent always remains very faithfully in the vicinity on guard duty, by rotation.

TABLE 1

Participation of parents in nesting activities, percent

Sl. No.	ACTIVITY	PARENT 1	PARENT 2
1.	Nest Building	50	50
2.	Incubation	70	30
3.	Nest Guard Duty	30	70
4.	Feeding the Chicks	60	40
5.	Chick Brooding	60	40
6.	Sanitation	70	30
7.	Vocalization	30	70

Note : Since the two sexes look alike, their differentiation was difficult. However we presume parent 1 was the female.

The eggs are laid early in the morning. In 8 of the nests studied the clutch size was 3 and in the remaining 5 nests the clutch size was 2 (one nest was abandoned at construction stage itself. The eggs are moderately broad oval, compressed towards the smaller end. The ground colour is pale pinkish white and markings are confined to a broad irregular zone near the large end with greyish brown specks and spots. When the young are hatched they are blind and naked. The parents continue to brood over the chicks by rotation for 6 to 8 days. On returning to the nest with food, the bird gives out a sharp note, signalling the brooding bird to make way for feeding the chicks. The brooding bird then leaves the nest in charge of the other bird and proceeds in search of food. The food included insects such as flies, moths, mosquitoes, etc. Most of these insects are caught by the snap of its bill after a lively chase. Figure 3 shows the nesting cycle of the species as observed in the study area. While on guard duty the Flycatchers perch near by and vocalise, their attention directed to the nestlings.

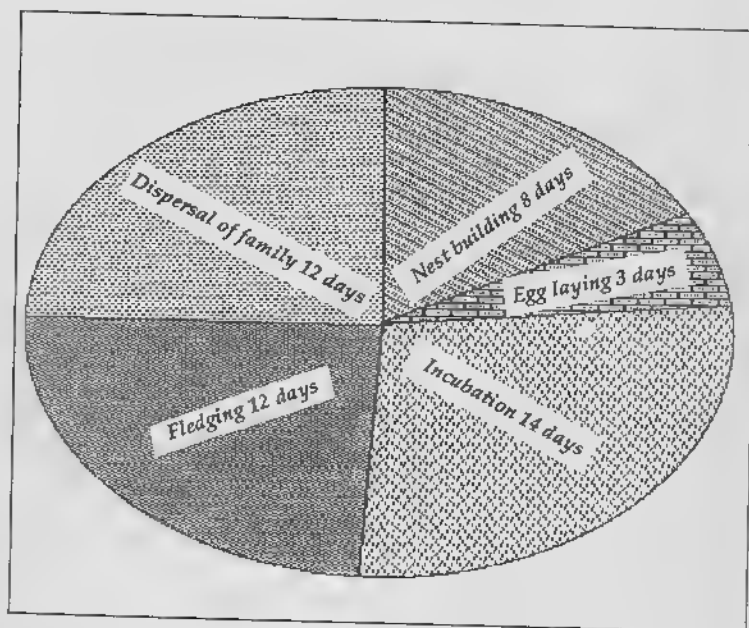


Fig.3. Average breeding cycle observed — 49 days

The territorial defence behaviour observed in these birds was not only against the birds of the same species but also against Paradise Flycatcher which occasionally intruded into their territory. However, they readily shared their territory with Tickells' Blue Flycatchers which nested alongside their own nests as observed in four instances.

While chasing intruders like Tree Pie, Coucal and Jungle Crows, the Flycatchers approached them from the sides and from behind, snapping their bills, but not pecking at the intruders. They always avoided coming in front of the powerful beaks of the intruders while chasing them from their territory.

The birds were also observed undergoing their annual postnuptial moult during early September 1988.

THE COURTER BECOMING THE COURTED

H. Daniel Wesley.

Animal behaviour with regard to the food, protection and reproduction has attracted the attention of man through the ages. The confusingly varied physical, physiological and behavioural adaptations suggest the plasticity and mutability of the genes; even closely related species differ. Watching the wild is indeed thrilling and pleasant.

Reproduction is for the survival of the species. The behaviour of food procuring and guarding oneself from the predators and the parasites is meaningless unless, in their fulfilment, the ultimate purpose is achieved. Bisexual reproduction is the commonest kind.

Of particular interest is the old-world Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) occurring in Tiruchirapalli,

Tamilnadu. It is one of the two species of painted snipes occurring in the world, the other being the South American *Nycticryphes semicollaris*. I saw a pair of a bird a few meters from my house in December 1981 for the first time. It was such a thrill that I took leave for a day to watch and identify. The male is smaller than the female. In colouration, the female is chestnut on the head, neck and chin that glistened in the sun, the under surface white that goes over the shoulder as a strap on either side to continue on the back as two buff bands. When at rest it is not easily located for the upper surface matches the colour of the muddy soil. The male is mottled black where the female is chestnut and his back is buff. Both the sexes have a median buff band on the head. A characteristic that is comical at times, particularly when they are at courtship display or challenging the intruders, is a white stripe along the side of the head from bill backward containing the eye in it presenting the figure of a spectacle.

The Painted Snipes are not really snipes at all, the resemblance to the latter being only superficial in the colour of the plumage, the straight and long bill for reason of the similarity of habitat and feeding habits - a case of convergent evolution. They are related to the water birds such as the crakes, rails and jacanas. The population of the old-world Painted Snipe in Tiruchirapalli is a section of a widely distributed population extending from Africa except Sahara through Middle East and India to Japan and south to Australia. According to Dr. Salim Ali it is "Throughout Indian Union upto 5000 ft. in the Himalayas; Bangladesh; Pakistan; Ceylon; Burma". Despite this it is a poorly known bird, much of the information about the species being that obtained on the populations in Africa, Australia and Japan. Recently the BNHS ringed some birds in the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary.

What makes the bird so rare is its crepuscular and nocturnal habits. It is only the female bird which calls. If she does, sure the breeding season has begun. Whoever I have talked to has confessed not having heard a Painted Snipe call. But I am sure many in the countryside would be familiar with the call though not with the bird itself. Twice have I been deceived by a simulated vocalization by urchins. Once, a lad referred to the bird I showed him in the field as (Pillukkiruvi), a corruption of (Pullukkuruvi) meaning bird of the grass.

Birds, like most other animals, are bisexual being males and females. In the courtship behaviour during the breeding season the male is the aggressive partner. He guards the territory, and the female makes the nest, lays and incubates the eggs, hatches them and provides for safety with or without the help of the partner in these functions. In the old world Painted Snipe, "The female is

polyandrous and the dominant partner in courtship ceremonies. She also fights rival hens for the possession of the eligible cock". The courtship ritual is elaborate often taking a whole day before it culminates in mating. I wish I had the necessary equipment to record the sequence of the ritual so that it is available in full to the world of Ornithology and others. It is unfortunate that the interest evinced by B.B.C. in including the courtship behaviour of the bird in a film serial World of Birds could not be sustained owing to the bird becoming rare due to habitat alterations. A disadvantage to the Indian naturalist is the paucity or lack of funds. Back to the Painted Snipe, territoriality is so strong in the species that no other pair is encouraged within the territory. The stranger pairs understand the attitude of the territory owner and hastily retreat before them. The courtship ritual is carried on within the territory, the female making quite a number of body and wing movements, jumping and tipping the hind quarter up and down. Each movement reciprocated by the male after a certain degree of stimulation seems to have a specific meaning which they understand each other. One of the interesting aspects of the courtship is bathing either alone or together much like a human being standing bent in the water, head and body below the surface and alternately raising and dipping, the arms splashing simultaneously. All the time the blinking spectacled eyes present a bird in excitement! Mating done and excitement over, the birds rest under the shade of a small bush if there is one, or in the grass, or engage in nest building. The nest is a shallow depression in the moist ground among the grass.

The hen lays 3 to 4 eggs with a ground colour of buff and brown streaks and blobs. The clutch completed, the hen leaves the male to brood alone for the entire period of incubation lasting for about 19 days. She is never seen in the territory thereafter. Her further activities are not known for certain. It is a conjecture that the female lays another clutch for a second male and so on. So the old world Painted Snipe is polyandrous meaning she has more than one mate for a breeding season. The species shares this character with the jacanas and the button quails in India. Similar behaviour is to be found in some birds from outside the country such as the Phalarope, Tinamous and the flight-less Tasmanian Gallinule, *Trogonyx mortierii*. The American Jacana has 2 or 3 mates. The Chinese Pheasant-tailed Jacana has ten mates each having to take care of 4 eggs. How many mates a female *Rostratula* has is not known. It is the rarest kind of mating system with the male having the risk of expending energy on services for another male's off-spring. It is a disadvantage to the female as well if she has to spend additional energy and time without any adequate compensatory advantages.

Indirectly, the system reflects a sex ratio that is biased in favour of the male sex. The compensatory advantage may reside in the probability of each female laying as many clutches as would be necessary to make up for those of the missing females in the population. This is one of the thousands of areas open for research in India.

Whatever, the advantages and disadvantages conjured up by man to explain polyandry, what makes the hen Painted Snipe behave the way she does is a mystery. Could it be heredity, a peculiar combination of genes? But then, the male must have the same genes too except for the sex chromosomes. Well, this is deep enough for a layman to get into and come out tidy. A physiologist would argue that it is hormonal, the female having a little more of male hormone that makes her masculine. This again is ticklish for it elicits a series of questions: Is not the secretions of hormones controlled by genes? Does the male secrete more female hormone and yet remain masculine in certain behaviour patterns? Similarly, does the female secrete more male hormones and yet produces eggs like a female? Is there an exchange of hormones between the two sexes? How in the first place did the hen get the behaviour of calling the male to breeding instead of the latter doing so? For all these questions the answer is, a simple and straight, 'We don't know'.

The title of the article may have been cleared now of its ambiguity. There is no hen-and-the-pecked affair in this case. There is rather a hereditary understanding between the two sexes to share certain duties in the process of the life of the species. The female Painted Snipe has not relegated the function of laying the eggs to the male; she can never do that. If she did, he would be a female too! Nature is replete with such intricate, confusing yet absorbing phenomena. It is just marvellous. But how long shall we have them around, the rate at which land is being utilized and industrialisation with all its side effects proceeds?

About the Ceylonese population of the species Beven (1913) has stated, "One is tempted to assume that along with the acquisition of the physical characteristic of maleness, such as superior size, more conspicuous plumage and complicated trachea, the female of this species has also acquired the ardour and pugnacity of the male, and that the courter has become the courted."

It would certainly be surprising to find that this is actually the case, for if the loss of the natural instinct be a step taken upon the road which leads to masculinity in all things and it surely is that - then the female of *Rostratula capensis* has not much further to travel along the road".

NOTES ON THE NESTING BEHAVIOUR OF MAHRATTA WOODPECKER

Harkirat S. Sangha, B-27, Gautam Marg, Khatipura, Jaipur 302012.

Last winter I made some observations on the nesting behaviour of Mahratta Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*. Opportunity arose when a pair started excavating a hole on a *Prosopis juliflora* in our backyard. There are some old and large trees in the backyard. A few observations are summarised below.

The pair began drilling the hole on January 10, '88 on *Prosopis juliflora*. The hole was 2 metres above the ground. Initially, work progressed rapidly, but slowed down, after 15 days, when cavity deepened and drilling had to be stopped frequently to eject chips from the hole.

Both sexes shared excavating the nest hole. The pair was noted to work about 5 hours in excavating the hole everyday. Each bird worked for 20-30 minutes during the drilling session before the other bird took over.

During all stages of nesting the pair was frequently tormented by a Copper-smith *Megalaima haemacephala*. It was seen everyday near the hole. At every opportunity he tried to investigate the hole. Once he was struck at by the woodpecker's bill as it peered in the hole. The pair did not tolerate other birds near the hole. Once a squirrel (*Funambulus pennanti*) was also attacked for venturing close to the hole.

The eggs were laid on March 3-4, '88. The incubation period could not be ascertained. I heard the chicks on March 18, '88. Both parents shared the duty of feeding the young. One bird was always near the hole, though at times both parents were seen leaving the hole, but never for more than 10 minutes.

In June, '88 the same nest hole was successfully used by Brahminy Myna *Sturnus pagodarum* for breeding.

In the concluding paragraph I am writing about another nest hole of Mahratta Woodpecker which was discovered by my reporter friend on April 10, '89. Interestingly, the hole was in a very disturbed area, (Bajaj nagar, Jaipur). In

the concrete jungle of houses there are hardly any trees. It was excavated 1.90 metres above the ground on a roadside *Morus indica*. When I went to see the road facing nest hole the young were being feed by the parents.

BIRDS OF SANGLA VALLEY

M.L. Narang, Zoological Survey of India, High Altitude Zoology Field Station, Solan(H.P.)

In May 1988, I visited the Sangla Valley which is located in the trans-Himalayan district of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. This valley is known as Baspa Valley also because of the river Baspa flowing through the valley. I had gone there in search of an highly endangered species of bird, Western Horned Pheasant *Tragopan melanocephalus*, better known as Western Tragopan. As very little is known about the avifauna of this valley so it is worth publishing a list of birds observed during my six days halt in the valley. Altogether 33 species of birds were recorded from the valley. These are as follows :-

Himalayan Griffon, *Gyps himalayensis* Hume; Bearded Vulture, *Gypaetus barbatus* (Linnaeus); Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus* Linnaeus; Monal Pheasant, *Lophophorus impejanus* (Latham); Koklas Pheasant, *Pucrasia macrolopha* (Lesson); Snow Pigeon, *Columba leuconota* Vigors; Rufous Turtle Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis* (Latham); Slatyheaded Parakeet, *Psittacula himalayana* (Lesson); Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus* Linnaeus; Hoopoe, *Upupa epops* Linnaeus; Scalybellied Green Woodpecker, *Picus squamatus* vigors; Pied Woodpecker, *Picoides himalayensis* (Jardine & Selby); Rufousbacked Shrike, *Lanius schach* Linnaeus; Golden Oriole, *Oriolus oriolus* (Linnaeus); Nutcracker, *Nucifraga caryocatactes* (Linnaeus); Alpine Chough, *Pyrrhocorax graculus* (Linnaeus); Jungle Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos* Wagler; Whitecheeked Bulbul, *Pycnonotus leucogenys* (Gray); Black Bulbul, *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* (P.L.S.Muller); Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher, *Muscicapa supercilialis* Jerdon; Orangebacked Bush Robin, *Erithacus cyanurus* (Pallas); Plumbeous Redstart, *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* (Vigors); Whitcapped Redstart, *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* (Vigors); Blueheaded Rock Thrush, *Monticola cinclorhynchus* (Vigors); Blue Whistling Thrush, *Myiophonus caeruleus* (Scopoli); Mistle Thrush, *Turdus viscivorus* Linnaeus; Greenbacked Tit, *Parus monticolus* Vigors; Redheaded tit, *Aegithalos concinnus* (Gould); Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea* Tunstall; Himalayan Greenfinch, *Carduelis spinoides* Vigors; Whitcapped Bunting, *Emberiza stewarti* (Blyth) and Rock Bunting, *Emberiza cia* Linnaeus.

The elusive Western Tragopan, the main target of the survey could not be located or heard in the valley. But I found positive evidence of its occurrence in the valley. At village Barua, which is located 5km south of Karcham (where the river Baspa joins the mighty Satluj), I found a portion of skin of Western Tragopan or 'Pyara' as it is locally called, in the custody of a temple. On my enquiry, the villagers told that the skin was collected from a nearby forest. The said forest was traversed for two days at dawn but no Tragopan could be located or heard. But Monals and Koklas were quite common there. I often saw Monals flying across the river Baspa and Satluj during my stay at Karcham. A detailed report of the status of Western Tragopan in the Sangla Valley has been submitted to Director, Zoological Survey of India and to Chief Wildlife Warden of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.

A NOTE ON THE FOOD HABITS OF THE INDIAN PITTA. S. Devasahayam and Anita Devasahayam, LA/38, KSHB Colony, Malaparamba, Calicut-673009.

An Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) visited the environs of our residence at Malaparamba in Calicut (Kerala) almost every day especially during the morning and evening hours from late December 1988 to early April 1989. Its favourite haunt was the shallow ditch behind our house which was always moist due to the flow of waste water from the kitchen and bathroom. We soon noticed that the bird was not only rummaging for insects but also for kitchen wastes in the ditch. It even readily fed on small pieces of idli, dosai, chappathi, bread, etc. which we threw from the kitchen window. However, it always retained its shy nature, hopping and flying away at the slightest disturbance. We were under the impression that the Indian Pitta was purely insectivorous in its food habits. We do not know as to whether this type of behaviour has been recorded earlier and feel that it would be of interest to record this observation.

FALCATED TEAL IN DEHRA DUN. *Dhananjai Mohan, 28, Trevor Road, F.R.I, Dehra Dun.*

On 25th Feb. 1989, I visited the Asian barrage about 30kms west of Dehra Dun city. This is probably the only large water body in Dehra Dun district and attracts waterfowl and other water birds in large numbers.

As I was scanning through a large flock of Pochards, I suddenly got a beautiful duck in the view which I didn't take long to identify as the Falcated Teal (*Anas falcata*). The metallic bronze-green and purple cap extending well below the nape in the form of a loose crest, dark collar at the neck and the falcated sickle shaped secondaries were diagnostic. The bird appeared to be in full breeding plumage. I had once seen the Falcated Teal at Bharatpur in Jan. 1986 but as far as I could recollect it wasn't in such bright plumage. The solitary Falcated Teal was in a big flock of ducks comprising of Tufted Ducks, Common Pochards, Wigeons, Shovellers, Gadwalls, Pintails, Red

Crested Pochards and Brahminy Ducks. The water was deep and only the Pochards were busy feeding, going under water every now and then. The Falcated Teal was first busy preening and later on it shoved its beak in the wings in the typical resting posture of ducks.

According to the Handbook, the Falcated Teal is a rare winter migrant to India. It has been reported only from Lucknow and Roorkee in U.P. It also doesn't figure in the Osmaston's Birds of Dehra Dun and adjacent hills. I couldn't find the Falcated Teal on other visits to the reservoir, twice in Nov., 1988 and once in March 1989.

Other important bird sightings at the Asian reservoir were Common Teal, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Coots, Dabchick, Pallas Fishing Eagle pair with a nest, Marsh Harrier, Great Himalayan Pied Kingfisher, Small Indian Pratincole, Peewit, Greenshank, Common and Green Sandpipers, White-capped and Plumbeous Redstarts, Blue Rock Thrush, Wall Creeper, etc.



Demoiselle Cranes (*Anthropoides virgo*), in Gujarat (March 1989)

Photo by late Shivajkumar Khacher

ASIAN CRANE CONGRESS - 1989

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

The Asian Crane Congress will be held during 27 to 29 December 1989 in Saurashtra University, Rajkot, India. Participation is requested from

- Individual crane researchers and conservationists,
- non-governmental organisations,
- post-graduate students and professors potentially interested in field research,
- governmental agencies and officials,
- crane working group members from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan,
- representatives from crane flyway countries, namely, Afghanistan, China, Iran, and U.S.S.R., and
- technical experts with useful information to exchange.

General goals of the Congress are

- continuation of discussions begun in China and U.S.S.R. about short and long term plans for crane research and conservation in the Asian subcontinent,
- improvement of communication, planning and co-ordination between crane enthusiasts within individual countries,
- development of workable structures for improving international cooperation and on-going information exchange,
- training and information exchange on field research techniques and migration studies (e.g., ground census, trapping, banding and tagging, aerial surveys and satellite tracking), and wetland monitoring, and
- increased understanding of the importance of sociobiological and wetland management issues in crane conservation and exchange of reports and research papers on Common, Demoiselle, Sarus, Siberian and Black-necked Cranes.

The tentative agenda for the Congress is as follows :
27-XII. 1989

0900-1400	Registration and distribution of research and position papers
1000-1300	Optional field trip to see cranes near Rajkot
1300-1400	Lunch
1415-1430	Formal opening of the Congress
1430-1500	Review of meeting held in China and U.S.S.R.
1500-1600	Summary of current crane conservation efforts and plans
1600-1700	Discussion of research or position papers
1700-1730	Break
1730-1830	Social hour
1830-1930	Banquet
1930-2100	Slide presentation : (1) Cranes, Wetlands, and Conservation in Gujarat (2) Crane Conservation Around the World.

28. XII. 1989 Technical Reports and Group Discussion

0900-1045	Sociobiology and wetlands : Management issues
1045-1100	Break
1100-1200	Radio telemetry and Satellite tracking techniques
1200-1230	Crane trapping and banding
1230-1400	Lunch
1400-1800	Field trip - demonstration of crane trapping and banding techniques for crane counting and behavioural studies
1800-1830	Free time
1830-1930	Dinner
1930-2030	Film "A Thousand Cranes"
2030-2130	Informal group meetings.

29. XII. 1989

0980-1000	National working group meetings to discuss implications of technical sessions for individual countries and crane species
1000-1100	Plenary session - discussion of needs /opportunities for international cooperation and research on cranes
1100-1115	Break
1115-1230	National meetings - goal setting, including fund raising
1230-1345	Lunch
1345-1530	Plenary session - regional planning
1530-1545	Tea break
1545-1630	To be determined
1630-1800	Conference resolutions
1800-1830	Break
1830-1930	Dinner
1930-2100	Final discussion /closing ceremony

30 & 31. XII. 1989 Optional Field Tour

To the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary and Rozi Island, Hingolghadh Educational Sanctuary or Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary.

30. XII. 1989 to 2, I. 1990 Training in Field Study Techniques (optional)

Registration fee : Indian delegate Rs. 300 : Foreign delegate American Dollar 200

It may be possible to provide expenses for travel and stay to a limited number of delegates.

All those who respond to this announcement will be sent the Second Announcement containing further information about the Congress.

All correspondence should be directed to Professor R.M.Naik, Co-ordinator, Asian Crane Congress-1989, Department of Biosciences, Saurashtra University, RAJKOT-360005, India.

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(4) The parents continue to brood over the chicks by rotation for 6 to 8 days.

(5) The food included insects such as flies, moths, mosquitoes, etc, caught by the snap of the bill after a lively chase.

(6) *The Habitat.* The Fantail Flycatchers showed a marked preference for locating their nests on trees and shrubs, present on either side of the stream abutting the farmland. Though the stream remains dry for most part of the year, water starts flowing along the stream during first week of May.





- (7) While on guard duty the Flycatchers perch nearby and vocalise their attention directed to the nestlings.
- (8) The young are 12 days old and are now ready to leave the nest to brave all hazards.
- (9) Govindarajan takes a close look and the Fantail Flycatcher regards him with eyes that are bright, steady and unafraid.

